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PUEBLO

Korea:

Pyongyang may be trying to probe US intentions on the Pueblo incident.

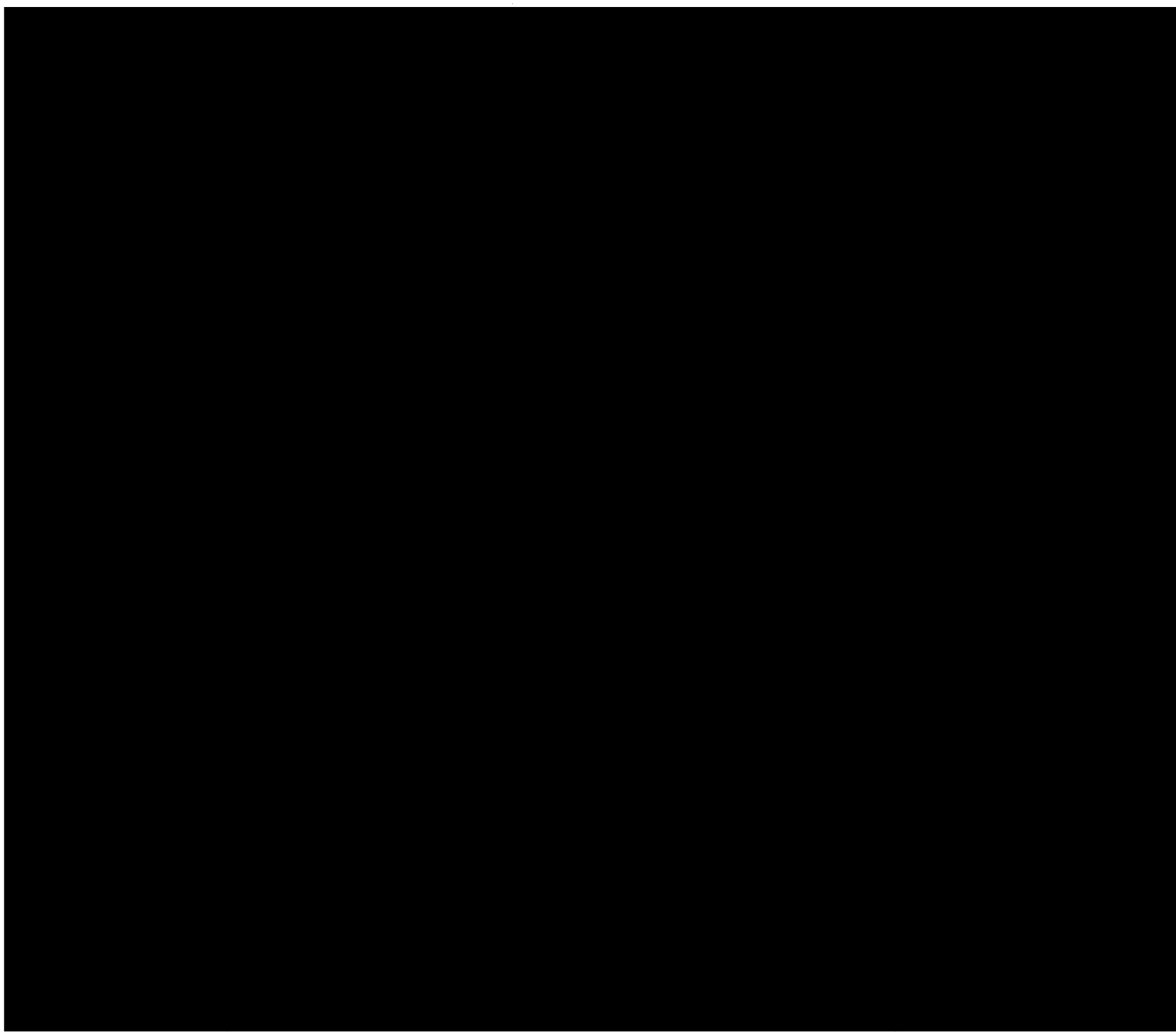
A North Korean journalist in Japan, who may be serving as an unofficial representative for Pyongyang, reportedly met on 22 February with a Western diplomat to discuss the issue. The journalist pressed for information as to what the US was trying to accomplish at Panmunjom and what the US was planning to do about the Pueblo seizure.

When asked what North Korea had in mind concerning punishment for the Pueblo crew, the journalist asserted, "that depends on the US." He stated

categorically that the crew would be released "as soon as possible" if the US apologized.

Seoul is attempting to quiet criticism of the government and generally tighten internal security in the aftermath of the North Korean raid on the presidential palace in January. President Pak Chong-hui on 27 February appointed a new defense minister, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Choe Yong-hui, after reshuffling top-level security officials last week. The new defense minister is likely to have a closer working relationship with US officials than his predecessor, and no change in South Korean policy is likely.

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